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Lambda Letters Project

32575

Vol. 4, No. 1 January, 1996 6212 Silverton Way, Carmichael, California 95608 Phone (916) 965-6851

From the Administrator

Two World Visions

We do not come to you pleading for understanding or begging your tolerance. We come to you affirming our pride in our lifestyle, affirming the validity to seek and maintain meaningful emotional relationships and affirming our right to participate in the life of this country on an equal basis with every citizen."

—Jim Foster, Democratic National Convention, 1972

My criticism is that [the gay movement] isn't just asking for civil rights; it's asking for recognition and acceptance of an alternative lifestyle which I do not believe society can condone, nor can I."

—Ronald Reagan during the 1980 presidential campaign

Urvashi Vaid includes these quotes in her fascinating new book, *Virtual Equality.* Urvashi is the former Executive Director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. She makes a number of very interesting points in her book. I'd like to share some of them, and some of my own thoughts, with you this month.

Lambda Letters is firmly committed to Jim Foster's world vision and the goal implied by it. But there are at least two approaches to reaching this goal. The moderate approach says, "We should attempt to persuade the world that lesbians, gays, and bisexuals are respectable. We must behave in a way that is acceptable to society." In reality, folks,

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Lambda Letters Has a Banner Year

We are proud to announce that Lambda Letters collected over 32,000 letters, post and e-mail messages, to legislators in 1995. That is 3,000 more than we have ever collected in one year. Feel proud. It is really *your* accomplishment. It occurred because so many people like you faithfully returned your letters to us each month. Some of you also carried samples of our letters to meetings, pride events, and other gatherings to get people to sign them. We also gathered a fair amount of constituent mail through an e-mail alert system that was started this year.

We hope to do even better next year. Many of you have sent your Lambdagram response card allowing us to send timely messages to legislators in your name. That should give us a great start to the new year. Our Board will be reviewing the effectiveness of Lambdagrams to determine whether or not they should be continued. We will keep you posted.

In any event, we had a great year and you made it all possible. We at Lambda Letters thank you from the bottom of our hearts. Have a wonderful new year!

Lambda Letters Progress Report

Letters Collected

November, 1995	3,470 letters
In all of 1995	32,423 letters

Dollars Spent

November, 1995	$ 2,895
In all of 1995	$18,229

Can You Help?

Please support the very important work of the Lambda Letters Project with your contributions.

The Lambda Letters Newsletter is published monthly except in December by the Lambda Letters Project Inc., 6212 Silverton Way, Carmichael, CA 95608. Postmaster: send address changes to the address above.

Lambda Letters Project

Statement of Purpose

To promote people of color, feminist, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and HIV/AIDS status advocacy and to bring people of color, women, lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and persons affected by or living with HIV/AIDS into full participation in the mainstream of American society now, exercising all the privileges and responsibilities thereof.

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Faces of Sacramento

Lambda Letters Gains Worldwide Reputation

This is a true story. One of our members was recently traveling in South America in Ecuador. He told someone he met there that he was from Sacramento. The other person answered by saying, "Oh there is a wonderful civil rights organization there called the Lambda Letters Project. They get people to write lots of letters to their legislators."



As it turns out, the other person works in Congressmember Robert Matsui's Sacramento office and sees a lot of our letters. Small world, isn't it? Your letters do count!

Advertising Rates

Business-card sized ads (3½" × 2") $10 per issue
Quarter-page ads $20 per issue
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Send payment and your camera-ready copy, along with your name and phone number, to:
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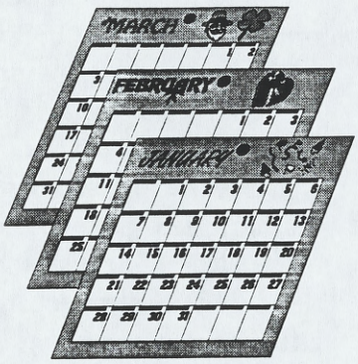
(*Actual cost to LLP for you to receive 44 letters in one year.)

Time to Order Your 1996 Lambda Letters Calendar!

Sales of our calendars are going quite well. We have sold over 60 so far. People like them because of the fascinating information they provide about famous people from our community and the highlights of our community's history.

They are inexpensive at $7, and buying them provides much needed financial support to the work of the Lambda Letters Project.

We urge you to purchase your calendar today. Buy some for your friends too. Please use the order form near the end of this news letter. You may enclose your orders with the letters you return to us. Please, do it today!



President Drops Ball

Last month we gave President Clinton two stars for banning sexual orientation discrimination in all civilian federal government jobs and for announcing his support of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act. This act would ban employment discrimination based on sexual orientation in private industry.

However, in mid-December the President demonstrated that he is definitely not a reliable supporter of gay rights. On December 19th, a liberal judge, U.S. Circuit Judge Guido Calabresi, removed himself from an appeals court panel that will rule on the constitutionality of the government's current policy on gays in the military. The judge removed himself as a result of a document filed by the government challenging his impartiality. A Justice Department letter filed with the appeals court noted that Calabresi opposed the policy of excluding gays from the military during Senate hearings on the subject in 1993. At the time, Judge Calabresi was Dean of the Yale School of Law. He was later appointed to the appeals court by President Clinton.

It is clear that reasonable persons could question the impartiality of Judge Calabresi in the matter of gays in the military. It is also clear that the Clinton administration is vigorously supporting a policy which discriminates against lesbians, gays, and bisexuals.



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HIV/AIDS Issue

Will TV Networks Air AIDS Public Service Announcements?

In belated response to the increasing rate of AIDS among young Americans —it is now the leading cause of death among males aged 25–44 years, and accounts for 1 in 3 deaths among African-American men and 1 in 5 deaths among black women in this same age group—the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has produced a series of radio and television public service announcements (PSAs) using the theme "Respect Yourself, Protect Yourself."

These PSAs are aimed at 18–25 year-olds and they " 'model' a balance of potentially lifesaving messages for young adults including abstaining from sex; communicating with partners and/or parents about sex; and using latex condoms consistently and correctly if choosing to have sexual intercourse."

One problem with these PSAs was that even as they were being prepared, sexphobic and homophobic individuals and groups pressured the CDC to increase the abstinence message in them and tone down or eliminate other "unacceptable or inappropriate" parts of these messages. As good as these PSAs are, they are fairly mild in content and *should be viewed as important public health measures,* not advice or permission to "just do it (i.e., have sex)," as some detractors still imply.

Because of these implications and counter pressure, the major networks and local radio and TV stations have been reluctant to air the spots. We need pressure to get these PSAs on the air and counter the anti-PSA pressure that is there. Thus this month each of you is asked to sign a letter to one of four major networks—CBS, ABC, NBC, and Fox—urging them to run these important public service announcements. The Lambda Letters Project staff will also send a letter of support and thanks for the PSAs to the C and other federal officials.

Women's Issue

Protecting Some Late-Term Abortions

Last month the Senate approved legislation which would ban rare late-term, partial-birth abortions—a procedure used by doctors when the life and health of the mother is in danger. The bill, S.B. 939, was introduced by Senator Bob Smith (R–NH) and has an identical version currently going through the House—H.R. 1833 introduced by Representative Charles Canady (R–FL).

Senator Barbara Boxer (D–CA) tried to add an amendment to S.B. 939 which would have allowed doctors considerable flexibility in deciding to use this procedure; but the Boxer Amendment was rejected in the Senate by a vote of 51–47. At the time of this writing, the bill is expected to be in the Conference Committee then on to the President for his signature. Although President Clinton is expected to veto this bill, we are directing our letters to him in an effort to ensure his resolve in the face of much opposition and controversy.

It is incredibly inhumane to criminalize a procedure which is currently used to save a woman's life. The decision on whether or not to use this procedure should be made between a woman and her doctor—not by politicians. Please sign this letter urging President Clinton to stand firm on this most serious women's health care issue and veto S.B. 939.



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Help Counter the Efforts of the AFA

The extremely homophobic American Family Association (AFA) has targeted another three companies for what it calls "pro-gay" business decisions. The AFA regularly encourages its membership to write letters to, and boycott the products of, companies that it perceives to be "promoting" homosexuality. The three most recent targets are the Charles Schwab Corporation, the MCI Communications Corporation, and the Walt Disney Company.

A recent letter in the *AFA Newsletter* referred to a *New York Times* article, which stated that the Schwab Corporation is not only supporting activities of lesbians and gays but is also going after their business. The newsletter editor's response commented on how sad it is that more and more American firms are ignoring "4,000 years of human history and the moral force of Judeo-Christian tradition to legitimize homosexual conduct." The editor also remarked that the Schwab Corporation was a major sponsor of the 19th annual San Francisco International Lesbian and Gay Film Festival.

We called the Corporate Communications department at the Schwab Corporation and they confirmed that they were a sponsor this year of the Film Festival. They said it was part of a marketing effort directed at the lesbian and gay community in the Bay Area. When asked if they planned to sponsor the Festival next year, they said there were no such plans at this time; that the sponsorship was a part of a one-time marketing effort. They also told us that the Corporation extends employee benefits to the domestic partners of its staff and that its nondiscrimination policy includes protections for sexual orientation.

The AFA is targeting MCI because it claims MCI "offers special discounts on long-distance calls to businesses owned by homosexuals." It claims MCI is involved in a cross promotion with the National Gay and Lesbian Business Alliance (NGLBA), a new group the AFA claims MCI helped to found.

A representative from MCI explained that MCI operates an Affinity Program. Under this program, she said, any nonprofit organization can enter into a business relationship with MCI to help sign up new subscribers to MCI's long-distance services. In exchange, MCI donates a small percentage of the long-distance charges collected from those new subscribers in whatever manner the organization wishes. She said that NGLBA was one of the organizations that participates in this program and that the AFA had taken certain liberties with this fact. She also told us that MCI does include sexual preference in its nondiscrimination policy.

Finally, the AFA continues to target the Walt Disney Company because of its recently-adopted domestic partnership policy. The AFA is also upset about the release of *Lie Down with Dogs*, a movie it calls a "homosexual film" put out by Miramax Film Company, a subsidiary of the Disney Company.



Please write to these companies to thank them for their efforts to treat all people in a fair and equitable manner. Encourage them to ignore the AFA's attempts to dissuade these companies from providing equal treatment to their lesbian and gay employees and customers. We have provided a sample letter addressed to one of the three companies for your use. You can either compose your own letter or simply sign the one enclosed.

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HIV Advocacy Training Held in Fresno . . .

The San Francisco AIDS Foundation, AIDS Project Los Angeles, and Central Valley AIDS Foundation are hosting a training session on HIV advocacy. Topics include letter writing; coalition building; advocacy at the city, county, state and federal levels; and other subjects. This is an excellent opportunity for anyone interested in learning how to effectively lobby elected officials who set policies that affect people with AIDS.

The training will be held on Monday, January 22, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., at the Central Valley AIDS Team offices at 1999 Tuolumne Street (ninth floor conference room) in Fresno. Staff members from the San Francisco AIDS Foundation and AIDS Project Los Angeles will conduct the training. There is a $10 registration fee to cover printing and duplicating costs. Please confirm your attendance by calling Russ at (209) 264-2437 by January 17th. For further information, call Randy Allgaier at the San Francisco AIDS Foundation at (415) 487-3085.

. . . and in Sacramento

The Sacramento AIDS Foundation, together with the San Francisco AIDS Foundation and AIDS Project Los Angeles, is planning training similar to the Fresno training described at left.

Plans for the Sacramento session are not yet final. However, it will probably occur either on Saturday, January 10th, or Saturday, February 10th. The event will be held at the Sacramento AIDS Foundation at 920 20th Street (second floor) in Sacramento.

Lambda Letters hopes to send a special mailing, giving further details on this event, to its Sacramento-area members. However, interested persons can also call Lambda Letters at (916) 965-6851 or the Sacramento AIDS Foundation at (916) 448-2437 (ask for Mike Lemon or Lisa Juran) for details.



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Please Oppose Segregated Schools

Assembly Bill 440, authored by Assemblymember George House (R–Modesto), would allow parents to have their children removed form any public school class that is not taught *entirely* in English. This could lead to racial segregation in our public schools because most of the students who need bilingual education are non-white.

For example, in this state this policy has already been established in the Willows public school district. As a result, that district has two all-Latino(a) and one all-white first grade classrooms.

As of the end of December, A.B. 440 was in the Assembly Education Committee. Unfortunately, it is expected to be approved quickly by that committee and by the full Assembly. Therefore, we urge you to write to State Senator Leroy Greene, Chair of the Senate Education Committee. Urge him to persuade his committee to defeat the bill.

We believe A.B. 440 violates Title VI of the United States Civil Rights Act of 1964. This law prohibits race and national origin discrimination in federally funded programs. A.B. 440 violates Title VI because it is likely to lead to segregated classrooms. Also, the U.S. Supreme court long ago (in Brown v. Board of Education, 1954) ruled that school segregation based on race is unconstitutional.

Racial strife is already a serious problem in California and A.B. 440 would only make it worse by stigmatizing children with limited English skills. One of the greatest barriers to understanding between different racial and ethnic groups is ignorance of one another. A.B. 440 would contribute to that problem by keeping children of different races apart. That denies them the opportunity to know and understand one another. It allows for the development of all sorts of ugly stereotypes that contribute to racial and ethnic conflict.

Actually, there is an interesting parallel here. Numerous studies have revealed that people who know open lesbians, gays, or bisexuals are the least likely to carry ugly, negative stereotypes of those groups. Similarly, children who become acquainted with kids of other ethnic and racial groups will probably grow up with fewer stereotypes about those groups. That can only contribute to furthering racial harmony.

We live in a shrinking world. To compete commercially with other nations, the United States need people who can converse in several languages. Bilingual education benefits those with limited English, but it also leads to English-only students learning the other language being used in the classroom. Grade school is the best time to be learning a foreign language. Indeed, many private schools begin teaching foreign languages in grade school, or even kindergarten, because they know that these are the years in which a child's ability to learn language is at its peak.

For all these reasons we ask you to write in opposition to A.B. 440.

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Two World Visions

Continued from page 1

that means suits and ties for men and dresses for women. Drag queens, the transgendered, the leather community, etc., are not welcomed by moderates because they "embarrass us" and keep us from gaining straight society's acceptance. As Urvashi notes, this approach has predominated in the last two decades.

However, in spite of our best efforts, an annual survey by the National Opinion Research Center reveals that between 70 and 77 percent of Americans still think homosexual relations are always wrong. The poll results have changed very little over the years. Many polls do indicate that more and more Americans are coming to oppose job discrimination against gays (74 to 81 percent opposed discrimination in recent surveys). But opposition to discrimination drops greatly when specific jobs are mentioned, such as teachers or clergy members. People still think gays are immoral and child molesters. They don't want gays as role models in their schools or churches. That makes our hold on equal treatment very tenuous.

On the other hand, numerous studies have shown that people who know open lesbians, gays, or bisexuals are much less likely to have such fears. Coming out is a powerful weapon against bigotry. Persuading large numbers of our community to come out is a major task of the march to full equality.

Urvashi describes the moderate's approach as trying to fit into and gain acceptance in the present American culture without really trying to change it. She feels that we should, instead, work to make fundamental changes to society.

In her view, true progress will occur only when we persuade society to surrender its fear of sexuality in general, and of homosexuality in particular. I think Ronald Reagan's comments make it clear that she is absolutely right. No matter how respectably we behave, if society continues to believe that homosexual sex is immoral, we will always be at risk in this society. We shouldn't apologize for our varying expressions of affection and sexuality. We should celebrate them and persuade society to celebrate them with us!

Bringing about such fundamental changes is a tremendous undertaking. We'll need all the allies we can find to accomplish it. To get that help from other communities, we will have to help them on their issues too. Besides—as Urvashi adds—she doesn't want to live in a "lavender bubble" in which only gays have gained their rights but other minorities haven't. I don't want to either. Do you?

Yours in the struggle,

Boyce Hinman
Administrator

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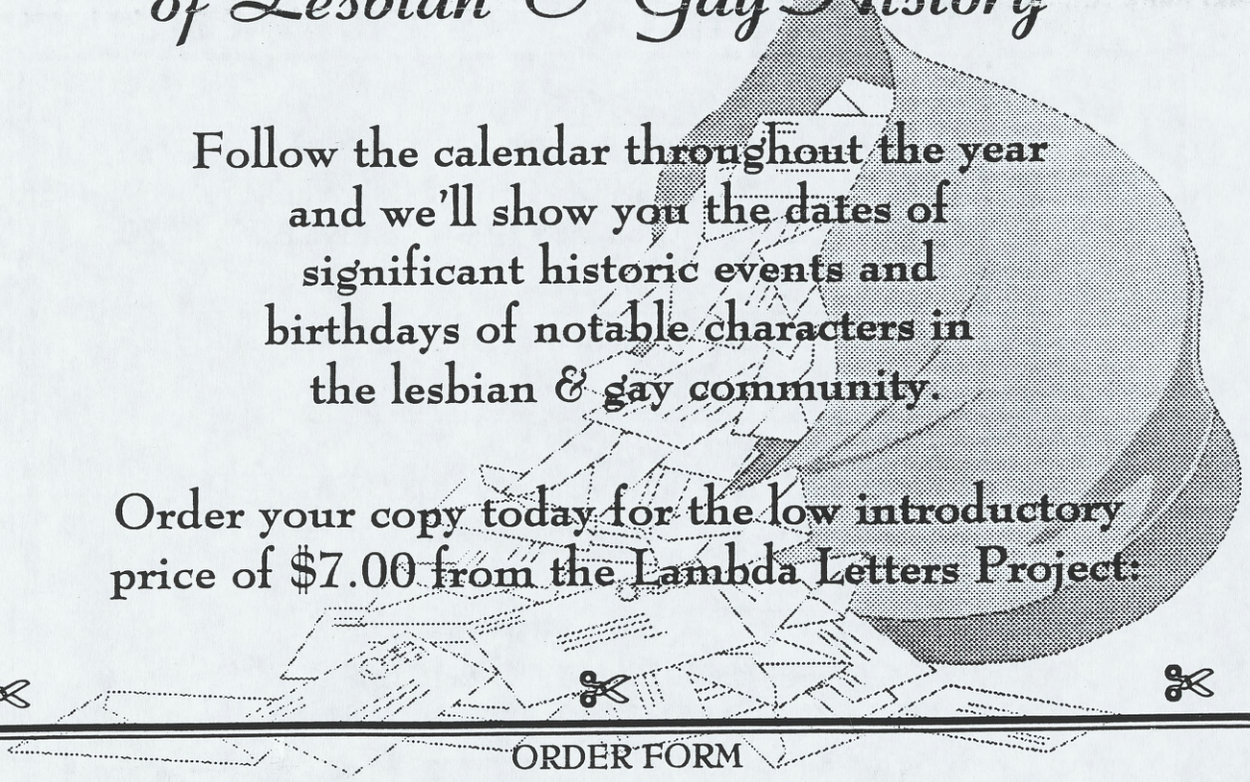
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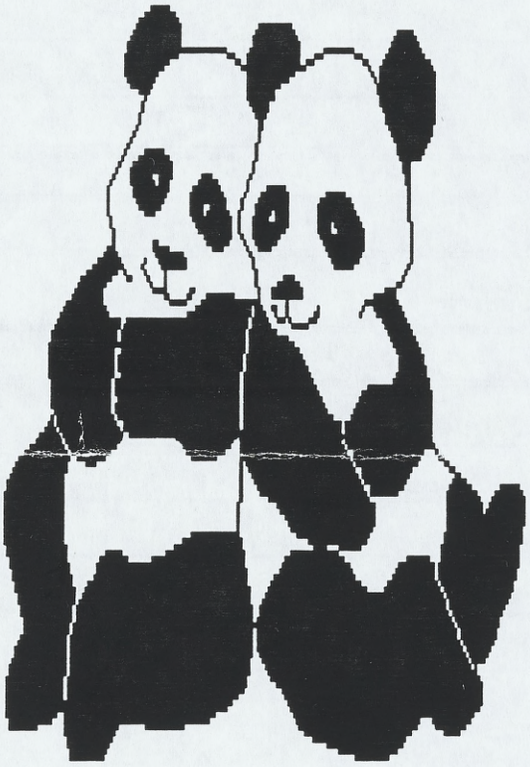
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